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## GROUP-WORK IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

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A child, like everyone else, learns to *do* by *doing*. This is such a truism, and everyone knows it so well, that it would seem as though nothing more need be said about it. Yet the number of things which our pupils actually *do* for *themselves* in the schoolroom is very small.

With our crowded and hurried conditions it is not easy to see how it can be otherwise. Teachers feel that in order to get the necessary amount of work done they must plan it in detail carefully beforehand, must get all the material ready, and must put the pupils through the work in as systematic and orderly a way as possible.

Yet, with all our care, how much of this work, which seems so clear and simple to the teacher who has thought it all out—how much of it is clear, vital, or palatable to the pupil? Like the proverbial horse that can be led to the water, the pupil can be put through a certain amount of work; but, just as the horse will not drink unless he be thirsty, so the pupil will not make these facts his own unless he *feel* the need for them. Do our lessons in grammar make our boys and girls speak good English at home, in the street, or even in the classroom? How many of our boys in school learn to add and subtract as our newsboys do on the street? How many lessons in history and civil government send better voters to the polls? How many of our boys and girls leave school with good rational habits of study and a *desire* to *continue* to study? Yet, if our young people do not learn to speak good English, to deal with figures accurately and quickly, to be conscientious citizens, and intelligent readers and thinkers of the world's problems, their education has not been as successful as it might be.

The question is how to make the work in the schoolroom of

the kind which will give our young people some of the same experience and training which they are expected to have when they leave school and go out into life. More than this, the school-work ought to give them a chance to express and use any natural inclination or talent which any of them may possess.

After a boy or girl has spent thirteen years in school and goes from the high school out into business, he or she is expected to assume *responsibility*, plan ways of doing things, make investigations, and talk to different sorts of people intelligently and forcibly. In the ordinary recitation in school, which has been planned and is conducted by the teacher, in which the business of the pupil is to answer the questions, the boy or girl takes no responsibility in the progress of the lesson, and gets no chance to plan, investigate, or discuss. If, however, the work is carried on by means of the social group, these are the very things that the pupils get an opportunity to do. I had learned the idea of the social group from Dr. Colin A. Scott, who had told us of the success with which it had been tried in some of the cities in the West.

It seemed impossible at first to get a chance to try the group-work—the conditions in the high school make it difficult. Instead of having the same pupils for five hours each day, we have a different set each hour, and it is with us but forty-five minutes. Some of our classes we see only three times a week, and, as a number of the pupils is preparing for college or normal school, there is not a moment to be wasted. The group-work must be directly in line with the work laid down in the course of study, and, as it is expected in the high school that lessons shall be learned outside, the work in the classroom must test what has been learned.

In spite of all this, I determined two years ago to try the social group-work in the classroom. The class in which the experiment was tried was a beginners' class in ancient history. There were ninety-three pupils in the class, and it was divided into three sections, each of which recited to me three times a week. There were two things which I wished to give them an opportunity to do: (1) to co-operate—to work together; and

(2) to give each individual a chance to do the sort of thing which he *particularly wants* to do.

I talked the matter over with the classes, showed them why the lessons which we had been having were not satisfactory, and asked them how they would like to try the experiment of conducting their history lessons themselves. The novelty of the idea pleased them, and after considerable informal discussion we decided to carry on our recitations in the form of business meetings. A chairman was appointed from the class to take charge of the meeting, and there was something of a sensation when I exchanged chairs with him. He appointed committees to nominate candidates for a president, vice-president, and secretary. These officers were elected by ballot for one month, and their duties were decided upon by the class. We had an amusing time when they tried to decide what they ought to do with me. I told them I was going to do just as little as possible in the class, so that they might have all the time and opportunity there was. They finally decided to call me "the executive officer," with power to exercise full authority if necessity required.

It was surprising to see the change in the whole atmosphere of the recitations which this order of things brought about. The pupils were timid at first, and I trembled for the result; but after a lesson or two they became used to it, and the work went with far more ease and spirit than I had dared to hope it would. Here is a brief sketch of the order of the new kind of recreation:

1. The president called the class to order and called the roll.
2. He called for the secretary's report, which was corrected by the class and was then formally accepted.
3. The president asked if there was any unfinished business. If so, that was taken up first; if not,
4. The lesson of the day was called for. Whoever wished to, arose, addressed the president, and began to describe the historical events. If he made a mistake or omitted anything, any pupil who noticed it arose and, when recognized by the president, made the corrections he thought necessary. Sometimes these corrections were not correct or did not go far enough, and sev-

eral others entered into the discussion. When there were several pupils on the floor at once, the one who was recognized by the president first had the right of way, and the others had to do the same in turn. That prevented disorder. This part of the work proved to be of great value. The pupils questioned each other's statements; and, when they could not agree, the point was left over as unfinished business until the next day; and in the meantime they consulted authorities to be able to prove their points, and they used their reasoning power to good advantage.

There were all sorts of unexpected, interesting developments as the work went on. Whenever difficulties arose, we solved them together. My opinion was of no more importance than theirs. When we did not agree, I insisted that they should try their way, so they would have confidence in their own judgment if they succeeded, or so they could see its weakness if they failed. Sometimes they elected officers who were not efficient and who bungled matters uncomfortably. The pupils suffered immediately from the results and got some valuable lessons in civil government at first hand.

To tell all this sounds as if it must have taken a great deal of time. As a matter of fact, we soon found that we had time to spare. The time which had previously been taken up by the teacher's questions was all saved, and the pupils could easily recite in half an hour what it had taken them an hour to prepare. The reports of the secretary gave all the review necessary; and, as the class grew more critical of both the history and the English of these reports, the secretaries grew more careful, and very often we had reports read with which no fault could be found. The roll-call and report were sometimes finished in five minutes, the lesson of the day in thirty more, and we found ourselves with ten minutes to spare. There were various suggestions as to what we had better do with the extra time. One was, that they take longer lessons; and this led us into the habit of letting them assign their own lessons; and they almost always took longer ones than I had been in the habit of giving them.

Another suggestion was that the scholars collect pictures and show them to the class during spare minutes. One boy said he

didn't have much luck finding pictures, but he would like to read things in other books and tell them to the class. A girl asked if she might draw some pictures from a book in the library, and still another boy asked me to get permission for him to go over to the Art Museum with his camera to take photographs of the casts there that were connected with our work. We did all these things, and many, many more; and these suggestions led to the richest development of all in the work of this year. The classes formed themselves into little informal clubs, met at recess and after school, and decided what each would do to contribute something interesting to the lessons. There were the drawing clubs, the camera clubs, and the clubs that brought in pictures, newspaper clippings, and told interesting accounts which they had read, calling themselves the "Sidelights Club."

We used the last half of the last history lesson each week for the reports of these clubs. They all did well for beginners, but the work of the drawing clubs was remarkable. A point worth noting is that some of the finest drawings were made by the poorest talkers.

The Sidelights Club did some fine work, too. They always had more to give than the time allowed. One boy who had tried several times without success to get a chance to talk asked me: "Do you suppose I shall ever get a chance to tell what I've found about Vestal virgins?" I told him to keep on trying, and finally he found his chance. Another boy wanted to describe a Roman house. He felt the need of a large plan to show the class, and, as he himself could not draw, he asked one of the girls in the drawing club to help him. She made him a beautiful pen-and-ink sketch of the ground-plan of a Roman villa. Still another boy, who had been specially interested in Pompeii, had been to considerable trouble to get a certain collection of Pliny's letters from the central library. He had read one of the letters describing the eruption of Vesuvius to the class, and some time afterward he said to me: "If we have time today, may I read another letter from Pliny?" "Isn't that book overdue?" I asked. "Yes," he answered, "but there's another letter in it that the

rest ought to hear." He was willing to pay the fine so they might hear it.

The discipline of these classes was the easiest I have ever had, and became almost entirely unnecessary as the year went on. On one memorable occasion a boy forgot himself and was severely reprimanded by the teacher. The next day the secretary described the whole occurrence minutely in her report. It nearly took my breath away and met with a storm of protest from the class. We had the report carefully re-read, and, on finding that every word of it was perfectly true and proper, the class accepted the report, and it was placed on file with the rest. There was no more unsatisfactory conduct to report in that section.

And what was the teacher's part in this new order of things? She was learning the truth of the statement that "no teacher is equal to the dynamic force of the class before her." Her energy was taxed to the utmost to utilize all that the pupils produced, to help to get material for them, to find and suggest books to be consulted, and to give them credit for work done.

Our history work was completed two weeks before the school closed, and the extra time was spent in debates, reporting items of interest, and in making the notebooks which they were to take home as rich and attractive as possible. As the year closed, I felt that I had never done such a satisfactory year's work, and in all the classes the pupils asked if they might not be allowed to continue their work next year in the same way.

The following year (which was 1905) we tried the same method in our graduating classes which were studying United States history and civil government.

*Every Monday* they elected a president for the week by ballot. They changed officers often, in order that all might be able to hold position during the year. One member of the class volunteered to be secretary for the week, and four others to be assistant secretaries.

Any mistakes that were made either in history or in English were corrected by the class. Sometimes the pupil who was said to have made a mistake insisted that he was right and read the

passage from the book on which he had based his statement. There were several kinds of books used in the class, and, as they often differed in statement, this led to comparison, keen discussion, and careful judgment by the class, before it could come to a conclusion.

As those who criticize are given as much credit as those who describe events, the attention of the class is constant, and, as time goes on, the pupils are careful not to make mistakes. Criticism by one of his own age means more to a boy than the criticism of a teacher. He knows very well that it is not fair to expect him to look at a thing from her point of view, nor to express it just as she does. But if one of his fellows points out his mistake, he is anxious to bring himself up to the mark at once.

If there was anything in a lesson or discussion that was not perfectly understood, the pupil who wanted an explanation felt at liberty to ask for it. This led to a most valuable kind of work. For instance, the class was discussing the administration of Monroe, and the Erie Canal was described. One of the girls arose and said: "Mr. President, I wish someone would explain to me how that canal works; I do not understand it at all." Several other girls nodded in sympathy. The boy answered: "It works by hydraulic pressure." "But just what is hydraulic pressure?" asked the girl. "I'll have to make a drawing to show it," the boy replied. He went to the board, put on the drawing, and succeeded in explaining it so the girls understood the *principle* very well. "Now, how do they use the hydraulic pressure at the canal?" was the girl's final question. Several boys tried to answer this, but none could make it clear to the girls, so they agreed to study it out more carefully and give it at the next lesson. Two of the boys investigated the matter and gave very satisfactory explanations of it.

Much of our civil-government work has been done at first hand. We had the state and city elections in our class. Previous to each election we found out what was being done in preparation for it. In connection with the city election this brought up the questions of the Luce law and the primary elections. We found we could get no help from our textbooks on



these subjects, so a letter was written to Mr. Luce asking him for a copy of his law. He sent us, not only what we had asked for, but also some interesting literature in regard to the law, and told us where we could get more if we needed it.

After discussing how such things should be done, the class divided itself into two wards, appointed the proper officers, and every pupil registered exactly as he would if he were a voter. The voting lists were typewritten and placed on the bulletin board a day or two later; and, when election day came and the voters of Massachusetts were at the polls, each of our pupils had a ballot which he had prepared for himself and was ready for our voting.

All raised their desk-covers and retired within their desks as far as possible while marking their ballots. This was the best imitation we could devise of the Australian system, and it answered very well. The pupils then deposited their votes in proper order in sealed ballot boxes, and the polls were closed. The ward officers counted the votes, the result was written on the board, and the election declared.

The same thing was done several weeks later when the city election took place. The pupils entered into the spirit of the thing, posted pictures of their favorite candidates on the bulletin board, and brought in interesting newspaper and magazine articles about them. It all seemed very real, even to the teacher; and if these boys and girls do not vote when they are of age it will not be because they do not know how.

The pupils this year (1906) have taken up the work very easily, and have been able to undertake some things which we were never able to do before. We have a Current Events Club, and among other things in which it was much interested was the coming exposition at Jamestown. Several magazines were brought in which contained accounts of it, and a discussion arose as to whether there really is a town of Jamestown now. In a similar way, a question came up as to whether or not William and Mary College is still in existence. One of our best histories states plainly that it is not, but some very good evidence was brought in on both sides. Finally one of the girls volunteered to

write to a high school in Portsmouth, Va., and ask both questions. A letter came back promptly, and, in addition to the information we sought, there was sent us a plan of the exposition and some pictures of historic interest. These were posted on our bulletin board for the benefit of all, and we corrected the mistake in our textbook.

This letter which we received from Virginia will be the beginning of a Correspondence Club. Our school is on the Bunker Hill battle-ground. When we have finished studying about the battle and have collected all the historical material possible, the classes will incorporate what they have gathered and worked out in a letter illustrated by sketches and photographs taken by our Camera Club. The first copy of this will be sent to the Portsmouth High School. Others will be sent to schools in New York City, Detroit, and London, England. These schools in turn will send us letters describing places of historic interest in their neighborhoods.

We have a Library Club also, which has taken upon itself the work of beginning a students' history of Charlestown. There are few pupils who do not write well when they are writing for a purpose.

There is much more that I might say in regard to this method of carrying on our work, but enough has been said to show that work based upon the *social idea* can be carried on even with *our present school conditions* in a way, not only successful and valuable, but also quite delightful.

Pupils are glad to work when they know that whatever they are able to accomplish by themselves will be appreciated in school. In searching for material, they ransack their attics and libraries, and learn to know what there is at home better than they ever did before. They talk about their work with the family and friends, who also contributed items of interest, souvenirs of travel, and sometimes relics of value. Last week a friend loaned one of our boys a volume of London magazines published in 1776. The boy read us a thrilling account of the Boston Massacre from it.

In closing, let me say that I have recently heard from three

teachers, who, though strangers to me, became interested in our work last year and tried the same method. The teacher in Detroit sends word of excellent results; one in the Medford High School says that one class of boys which was not at all interested in English history before carried the work along with life and spirit when it got a chance to conduct the class itself. I quote from the letter of the New York teacher. She says:

The class of older girls, which I had dreaded, had a life about it that I had never been able to arouse. The girls were full of interest in the subject, and I found they loved to talk provided I would give them a chance, and I did learn to keep my lips closed more and more. I had never realized before how much talking I had done.

As a final word, may I make a plea that we give our boys and girls a chance to work in ways more natural to them; that we learn to know them better; that we may keep their school-life so keenly in touch with the life outside that they may feel that *both* are vital parts of the social world in which they live?